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The role of adult facilitators in arts-based extracurricular settings: Perceived factors for success of adult–youth relationships

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Abstract

Extracurricular arts programmes and supportive adult relationships provide youth with opportunities for positive development, however, more research about how relationships within these programmes develop and what factors and practices adults use to guide their work would help to improve youth programmes' outcomes. Eight Film Club facilitators at an after-school film-making club for students in grades 5 through 8 were interviewed about their perceived their role and what practices they successfully utilised. The semistructured interviews were then thematically analysed. Facilitators perceived the development of authentic and supportive relationships provided a foundation for meaningful learning. Rather than being directive, the facilitators had a collaborative approach to engagement, which allowed for social and emotional learning opportunities and established youth agency. Relationships within creative extracurricular spaces, which are youth-led and include supportive adult facilitators may provide young people with valuable opportunities for social, emotional and identity development.

KEYWORDS

arts-based education, extracurricular, mentoring, socioemotional development

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Relationships between adults and youth within extracurricular settings are suggested to provide a bridge between child and adult worlds, allowing youth the chance to practice interacting with adults in less structured or power-imbalanced ways. These relationships have been conceptualised in a number of ways. Some authors refer to mentoring relationships, in which the adult is positioned to provide emotional reflection and supportive emotion coaching (Rhodes, 2002; Sharp, 2014). However, youth–adult partnerships, or youth–adult relationships, involves a more democratic relationship, which potentially occurs through shared work, and is focussed on promoting social justice (Zeldin et al., 2013). The body of research suggests that extracurricular youth–adult relationships can impact young people's socioemotional, cognitive and identity development (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Rhodes, 2004). They have the potential to positively impact trajectories of socioemotional development (Jones & Deutsch, 2010).

2 | ADULT–YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS IN EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMMES

Supportive relationships between youth and adults are an essential part of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2011). Extracurricular programmes are one way to achieve opportunities for socio-emotional learning through these meaningful adult–child relationship (Sharp, 2014). Within these semistructured settings, adults may be positioned to create a sense of safety, belonging and common purpose (Greene et al., 2013; Matsuoka et al., 2015), allowing for a focus on emotional recognition and prosocial skill development (Noam & Tillinger, 2004).

Research has demonstrated the positive impact that involvement in extracurricular programmes has on school engagement, commitment to learning and overall wellbeing (Chapin et al., 2019; Mahoney et al., 2004, 2005; Taylor et al., 2017). Extracurricular settings provide youth with interpersonal experiences necessary for the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Larson, 2000). These spaces provide an alternative to the home or school environment, allowing an opportunity for young people to engage with different adults, build relationships and take chances, in a fun and informal setting (Sharp, 2014). This focus on the development of socioemotional assets is suggested to support the psychological readiness of children transitioning into high school (Matsuoka et al., 2015), helping to bridge the gap between academic and interpersonal domains (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017; Rhodes, 2004). Researchers have demonstrated the positive impact that involvement in extracurricular programmes has on school engagement, commitment to learning and overall wellbeing (Burton et al., 2000; Larson, 2000; Taylor et al., 2017).

Some researchers suggest that involvement in creative activities may be particularly beneficial for young people (Larson, 2000; Metzl & Morrell, 2008). These socially connected learning environments, support individual creative expression, and are suggested to magnify opportunities for learning (Metzl & Morrell, 2008). Creative extracurricular settings allow for exploration within a supportive interpersonal setting, encouraging the development of self-awareness and interpersonal understanding (Blum-Ross, 2013; Grunstein & Nutbeam, 2007; Wright et al., 2013) while also increasing cognitive flexibility, critical thinking and the ability to imagine new possibilities (Burton et al., 2000; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Arts-based extracurricular activities also provide opportunities for young people to learn skills that they may otherwise not have been exposed to (Metzl & Morrell, 2008).

The benefits of youth involvement in creative pursuits have been widely demonstrated, including performing arts and theatre (Salmon et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2013), dance, music (Grunstein & Nutbeam, 2007) and film (Blum-Ross, 2013). Furthermore, involvement in creative arts-based activities has been suggested to support socio-emotional and interpersonal development by creating an environment where emotional, cognitive and social skills

can be practised and fine-tuned (Burton et al., 2000). However, limited research has explored how staff within creative extracurricular programmes support youth or how they view their role.

3 | THE ROLE OF THE ADULT IN AN ADULT-YOUTH RELATIONSHIP

Zeldin et al. (2016) explored the processes in youth-adult partnerships, to better understand the important factors related to quality afterschool programmes. Their research with an afterschool programme in Malaysia concluded the main components of youth-adult partnerships included youth voice in decision-making and supportive adult relationships, and this contributed to the developmental outcomes of youth empowerment and community connectedness when encompassed by programme safety and engagement. The expansion of social connections, as well as confidence gained from learning to build relationships with adults, is suggested to increase youth agency and confidence seeking support (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). A supportive adult relationship may offer corrective social and emotional experiences to young people who have previously experienced caregivers as unreliable or unavailable (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008), providing relational security, and encouraging youth to seek out support in times of stress (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Simply being exposed to adults within an extracurricular setting does not guarantee the development of supportive relationships. Important relationship factors include trust (Griffith & Larson, 2016), respect and supporting autonomy (Deutsch & Jones, 2008), acceptance, engagement and compassion (Pryce & Keller, 2011). Youth-adult relationships exist on a continuum from adult-led to youth-led collaborations. Research suggests that quality youth-adult partnerships, which fall in the middle of this continuum, directly contribute to positive youth development (Weybright et al., 2016).

There are fewer models which identify the particular strategies that adults might use to maximise outcomes. Zeldin et al. (2013) suggest to maximise agency, adults should view their work through a social justice lens, by acting collectively in the work. However Zeldin et al. (2016) also acknowledge that there is a paucity of research that examines what makes up a successful extracurricular programme.

Jones and Deutsch (2010) provide a strong model of youth-adult relationships that suits the aim of the current study. They explored relational strategies used by staff facilitating an extracurricular group via interviews with youth participants and programme observations. Three overarching factors emerged as contributing to engagement and youth development, including: making an effort to reduce hierarchical power dynamics, respecting youth autonomy while supporting social inclusion, and maintaining an awareness of group dynamics and relationship difficulties (Jones & Deutsch, 2010). Minimising relational distance is described as efforts made by the staff to reduce their authoritative status, thereby minimising the difference between mentors and youth by finding common ground on which to connect with youth. By reducing the power dynamics within adult-youth relationships, facilitators aimed to bridge the gap between youth and adults. Second, actively supporting the inclusion of all youth participants was found to increase both group cohesion and strengthen mentor relationships. Facilitators were reported to create an inclusive environment while respecting youth autonomy, encouraging peer acceptance whilst allowing for youth ownership, providing an opportunity for youth empowerment while supporting the development of prosocial behaviour. Finally, mentors awareness of social fractions and group-dynamics was suggested to support youth's development of problem solving, allowing a space where young people can work on social and emotional skills guided by caring adults (Jones & Deutsch, 2010). This model is represented in Figure 1.

This study provides greater insight into the formation of meaningful adult-youth mentor relationships (Jones & Deutsch, 2010). However, limited information was gathered from staff facilitators, overlooking their perspectives on creating these supportive relationships. Staff facilitating extracurricular programmes likely use strategies to engage with the young people they are supporting. Further exploration of the climate necessary for fostering trust may allow for a more nuanced understanding of the emotional and interpersonal benefits possible within arts-based extracurricular spaces.

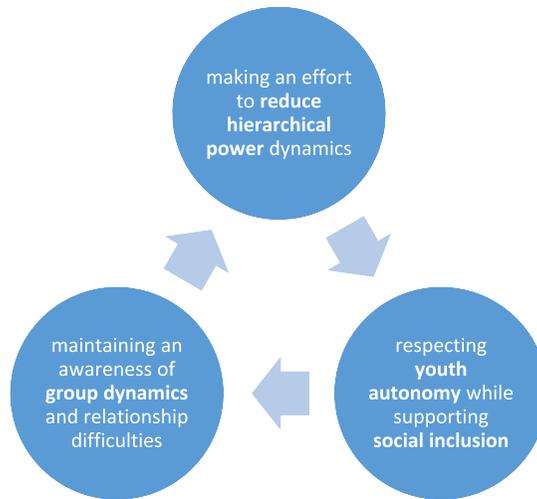


FIGURE 1 Jones and Deutsch (2010) model of adult roles in adult–youth relationships

4 | CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT STUDY: FILM CLUB

Polyglot Theatre is an interactive drama group that provides opportunities for creative learning and individual expression, seeking to support youth psychological wellbeing, interpersonal engagement and identity development. In partnership with a Catholic Primary School, Polyglot conducted a weekly after-school Film Club for students in years 5–8. The aim is to supporting youth socio-emotional development and transition to high school through arts-based activities. The school is located in an urban area of an Australian city and the majority of the students are from culturally and linguistically diverse families. Polyglot purposively partners with schools with students who were more likely to be in lower socioeconomic brackets and more culturally diverse, who they believe would benefit from the opportunities provided by Film Club. Facilitators are film artists and film makers (approximately 3–4 staff) who worked with a small group of young people (approximately 10–15 students each year) to create a 5–10 min film over the course of each school term. Film Club challenges the young people to drive the content and process, maximising their creativity. At the end of the school year, they hold an event to share the films they create with family, community and other stakeholders.

Film Club facilitators are artists with various film, drama and production experience who were selected for facilitator roles based on previous experience working with youth, and an interest in working in a youth-led creative space. No formal training was expected of, or provided to facilitators, however, an induction process allowed new facilitators to observe Film Club sessions before beginning the role. Several facilitators acted as programme directors, taking a broader approach to facilitation by ensuring that all youth and staff were supported, and holding a more disciplinary role when necessary. Other staff acted as facilitators, working with smaller groups of young people to develop films directly with youth.

A previous qualitative study interviewed the young people attending Film Club to determine the perceived advantages of the programme from the perspective of the youth (Chapin et al., 2019). Participants reported positive experiences including self-efficacy, group belonging, and increased confidence, which they felt impacted on their desire to learn, autonomy and social skills. However, given that the programme does not provide structured direction to the facilitators in how to achieve these aims, we were interested to know how facilitators conceptualised their role to achieve these positive outcomes.

5 | AIMS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Research that explores the process by which adults influence developmental outcomes and the models they use are important to inform the development of their adult–youth relationships in extracurricular settings. To our knowledge, no qualitative research has yet explored the relational complexities of running an arts-based extracurricular programme from the facilitator's point of view. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how staff facilitating an arts-based extracurricular activity perceive their role as facilitators, and whether these perceptions fit into existing models of adult–youth or mentoring relationships.

6 | METHOD

This study was approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (HRE16-267).

6.1 | Participants

Participants were Film Club facilitators included artists with various film, drama and production experience. There were a number of different roles within Film Club, and the term of employment varied from one school term to three years. Most had previous experience working with youth. All facilitators who had been involved in Film Club for a minimum for six months were invited to participate in an interview via email. Over this time about 12 facilitators had been involved in the programme. Eight facilitators responded and participated in the current study.

6.2 | Procedure

Before gathering data, the interviewer and researchers observed a session of Film Club to get an orientation to the activities conducted within the session and the range of interactions between adults and young people in Film Club. To gather data, semistructured interviews were conducted. All interviews were conducted by one researcher on the project. An interview was arranged at a time and place convenient to the participant and researcher, and the format involved open-ended questions with a flexible semistructured approach allowing participants to discuss topics they felt to be significant. The interviews ranged between 20 and 60 min with questions focusing on their role in Film Club (e.g., “What are something's you do to support young people in film club?”), and how to best support youth engagement and positive development (e.g., “What do you do in film club that you believe helps give youth a sense of agency, confidence or competence?”). At the start of each interview, participants were reminded that they could skip any question, and delay or withdraw from the interview at any point without repercussions.

6.3 | Data analysis

Personal experience is interwoven within cultural and social perspectives, and cannot be meaningfully understood in isolation (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Thus, it was necessary to identify a method of data analysis that was flexible enough to make meaningful sense of subjective information, while acknowledging the social context that gives it value (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Thematic analysis (TA) is a method of identifying and analysing patterns, ideas and themes within qualitative information by drawing on the meaning held within language (Creswell, 2006; Guest et al., 2011). The theoretical freedom held by this approach offers the flexibility to explore themes from an

inductive stance, while maintaining a pragmatic structure that allows for methodologically sound research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013).

TA allowed for a deeper exploration of repeated spoken patterns within and across transcripts which provides an underlying idea of individual's experiences within the Film Club. Considering there is a degree of interpretation within TA this study was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach which explores and develops themes in a deliberate and systematic manner using inductive reasoning. The six steps were:

- (1) All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and initial thoughts noted;
- (2) Initial codes were generated from close examination of the raw data where certain quotes were grouped and highlighted as interesting elements;
- (3) The further meaning was extracted and interpreted through grouping codes;
- (4) Refinement of these themes occurred using a thematic map so there was coherence between them;
- (5) Final themes were defined and named;
- (6) Patterns that emerged across interviews were compared and contrasted, and this revealed the primary and secondary themes.

6.4 | Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is a conceptualisation of how the research findings can be seen as credible, transferable and dependable. The researcher perspective can unavoidably hold sway over what is "discovered" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study followed the best practices outlined by Guba's (1981) to ensure appropriate credibility, transferability and dependability. *Credibility* was obtained through careful transcription of interview data, allowing for accurate representation of participant experience and privileging participant's unique knowledge and lived experience (Willig, 2013). Initial codes used participant's own words to maintain the accuracy of meaning, and quotes were provided so that readers can independently make sense of this data. Given how closely linked the process of understanding experience is to one's own perceptions and beliefs it was necessary for all interview transcription, coded data and emergent themes were crosschecked by a peer-researcher. The peer researcher made comments on the developed themes and looked for any missing themes or those which did not have enough quotes to support their existence. Themes were only included if multiple quotes existed across multiple participants. Comments were then discussed and changes to coding agreed on between reviewers. This allowed for greater separation between researcher preconceptions and the understanding of participants' experience (Creswell, 2006). The commitment to representing detailed accounts of participants' experience was intended to maximise *transferability* (Table 1).

Dependability was enhanced through adherence to Braun and Clarke (2006) framework for TA, documenting the process within written protocols to employ a consistent approach to interpretation. Inquiry audit was aided by use of a peer researcher to conduct crosschecking of themes, and supervision and supervisory consultation throughout the study. This also maximises confirmability (Willig, 2013).

7 | FINDINGS

TA uncovered three primary themes indicated by participants as fundamental to their role as a Film Club facilitator, as shown in Table 2. These were authentic adult–youth relationships, collaborative interaction and a focus on agency. Subordinate themes build on the corresponding primary theme, offering greater detail of facilitators' actions and interactions.

TABLE 1 Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Experience within Film Club (months)	Ethnicity
Carlos	Male	6–12	Anglo Australian
Toby	Male	6–12	Anglo Australian
Adam	Male	6–12	Anglo Australian
Rose	Female	6–12	Anglo Australian
Sherry	Female	6–12	South Asian Australian
Raquel	Female	6–12	Anglo Australian
Jodi	Female	6–12	Anglo Australian
Alex	Female	6–12	Anglo Australian

Note: Pseudonyms were chosen with a random name generator.

TABLE 2 Primary and subordinate themes related to facilitators' roles and processes

	Primary Themes		
	Authentic adult–youth relationship	Collaborative interaction	Fostering agency
Subordinate Themes	Reflecting enthusiasm	Balancing power	Encouraging responsibility
	Supportive communication	A youth-led approach	Achieving success
	Addressing emotions	Managing group dynamics	Building self-confidence

7.1 | Authentic adult–youth relationship

All facilitators commented on the importance of developing authentic relationships with the young people in Film Club. These relationships were described as “long-term”, “safe” and “consistent”, with facilitators commenting on the unique opportunities provided within these “very different relationships”. Rose stated: “We’re not school... we don’t want the same relationship that a teacher has with a child. We’re really trying to make a relationship that where mutual understanding can happen”.

Facilitators did not use the word ‘mentor’ when describing their role, instead, they described their relationship with the young people in Film Club as caring, nonjudgemental and accepting, with facilitators reporting the importance of attending to, and showing interest in the young people. This relationship provided a frame within which safe and empowered learning could occur. Three subthemes provide further elaboration on this theme: reflecting enthusiasm, supportive communication and addressing emotions.

7.1.1 | Reflecting enthusiasm

The idea of fostering engagement through encouraging “fun”, “freedom” and “excitement” was noted by all facilitators as vital for the creation of meaningful connection. This was described as an intuitive process, born out of a reflected sense of openness, interest and enthusiasm modelled by the facilitators themselves. Facilitators are “interested and excited” adults, who are willing to meet Film Club participants where they were at, engage in play and “make jokes”, while genuinely valuing youth energy. Carlos stated: “Enthusiasm and investment can actually break down a lot of those walls without [you] actually having to work very hard”. They tried to create a space

where fun can be the shared intention, stating that facilitators' emotionally open attitude and respectful engagement led the young participants to understand this relationship as "actually sincere".

7.1.2 | Supportive communication

All facilitators commented on the importance of communication, with a strong emphasis placed on listening, talking to the young people about their interests and making an effort to "talk their language". The establishment of an authentic relationship was reported to be what "allows [for] open and frank discussion" to take place. It was important to ensure youth felt heard, seen and accepted, by "someone who's genuinely interested in their stories". Sherry noted the importance of "respectful engagement", stating: "Speaking to them like they're adults, and not speaking down to them, is really important".

7.1.3 | Addressing emotions

A key element that emerged within this relationship was the recognition and support of youths' emotions. All facilitators discussed the importance of acknowledging and addressing emotional content within their role as facilitators. Facilitators spoke of using the shared creative focus within Film Club, as well as their established relationships with Film Club participants, to acknowledge, explore and "hold" big emotions. Raquel stated that they worked to "hold the space, and hear it even if I don't have an answer to it".

Other ways to address emotions included "empathising" and "try[ing] not to move away from the uncomfortableness too quickly". They tried to ensure youth were "not being rejected when they have a big emotion" and they could use a creative space to explore emotional understanding and then work through social and emotional issues. Jodi described her approach to emotional support, stating: "I normally sit, quietly, my default response is to observe what's happening, and to give them the space. Sometimes I feel like adults fill the space with speaking".

7.2 | A collaborative approach

Facilitators emphasised the importance of encouraging collaboration between the young Film Club participants and themselves, describing this as an equal relationship that involved the young people "in every part of the process", "treating them like peers, like collaborators". Alex stated:

Rather than saying these are the school rules and you must do these things... We say we're going to make our own Film Club rules. In making our own rules, I think they feel they have they have power and have been listening to.

This approach seeks to meet young people on an equal footing within a space where their ideas are valued, and adults are open to learn. While facilitators bring expertise, it is the youths who drive the creative content. Three subthemes further explain the collaborative approach: balancing power, ceding the lead and managing group dynamics.

7.2.1 | Balancing power

Prominent throughout all interviews was the idea that the power dynamic between adults and youths at Film Club was in some way different to what the young participants experienced in the rest of their lives. A conscious effort

was made by facilitators to not be authoritarian or directive, but instead to treat youth as equally powerful and in control. In reflecting on this approach, Toby stated: "If a program involves students at their level it has the potential to make a lot of change". Facilitators developed a "creative equality" by "taking the time to talk to [the youths], and engage with them at [their] level", "meeting them as an equals as much as possible".

Film Club directors were occasionally called on to ensure safety, and reinforce agreed upon group rules, leaving other facilitators free to engage with youth at their level, creating a rare sense of freedom within this adult–youth relationship.

7.2.2 | Ceding the lead

Facilitators spoke of the importance of Film Club being driven by the young people, with this universal perspective emphasising the importance of encouraging, validating and valuing youth ideas, providing praise for effort and believing in what the young people have to offer. "Writing everything down" was noted as a prominent means of encouraging and validating youth ideas, and Jodi described this as a process as "Allowing their [the youths'] ideas to be valid enough to jot down and kind of solidify and grow". Qualities of "mutual respect" and "genuine interest" were also discussed, with facilitators emphasising the importance of getting to know each individual and his/her needs.

7.2.3 | Managing group dynamics

All facilitators spoke about the need to create a sense of community, ownership and support among those involved in Film Club. Raquel said, "There's a real [effort on behalf of the facilitators] to not let anyone feel anonymous".

Facilitators spoke of building a "team" mentality within the club, and a sense of solidarity through shared purpose. Adam stated they did this by: "Establishing that they're a family, that they are a team, really early on, and then making them accountable to that... using those words [team, family] a lot". Facilitators used this shared sense of "team" to address social fractions within groups, reporting that this set up a sense of peer-peer safety and support. The idea of "team" was also reinforced by facilitators' own modelling of positive behaviour towards each other, encouraging an atmosphere of community.

7.3 | Focus on agency

Film Club aimed to support youth agency through making efforts to promote youth creative freedom, allowing a safe space for self-exploration and expression, and supporting the young participants to "find their voice". Toby stated that supporting youth agency was about: "Planting the seed, [and] letting the child develop it. Polyglot gives a bit of pruning along the way. But the tree's still the child's tree". Three subthemes further explain strategies to focus on youth agency: encouraging responsibility, achieving success and building self-confidence.

7.3.1 | Encouraging responsibility

All facilitators commented on the importance of encouraging youths' sense of responsibility within the Film Club. Facilitators noted that providing opportunities for responsibility and "making them accountable" for this, provided "purpose and meaning", and the opportunity to experience empowerment. Raquel stated: "It gives them that feeling of, 'I'm a part of this, I'm important, what I think matters.'"

Examples of fostering responsibility included encouraging Film Club participants to share their unique knowledge and skills with others, support other group member, take on additional roles within film production and “set an example” for the younger Film Club participants.

7.3.2 | Achieving success

All facilitators commented on the necessity of finding a balance between fun and the tangible creation of a film. Adam described this as a balancing act, stating that: “It’s about the journey; it’s not necessarily all about the result. But you know it’s hard to get people inspired when they don’t believe in the end result”.

Alex commented on the power achievement in supporting the development of a growth mindset, stating: “You’re taking risks with things... for them to see that materialized on the screen and look good, kind of reinforces that it’s ok to take risks”. The sense of accomplishment was obtained by the young people “doing something difficult and succeeding”. Through developing youth ownership of the creative content, the young participants were able to experience a sense that they own the final product, incorporating “a sense of pride in something they have created” into their perception of self, ability and belief of their own potential.

7.3.3 | Building self-confidence

The idea that the young people involved in Film Club were developing greater “confidence”, “assertiveness” and belief in their own thoughts, ideas and potential, was important to facilitators. Rose described this by saying:

Some of it is about the future, and some of it really is just about thinking about yourself [the film club participant] as a person with a lot to offer... Because you’ve done some difficult things it means that you can do those difficult things, you have greater confidence in yourself.

Facilitators felt that their role was to provide participants with exposure to personal success and adult role models who were interested in their unique talents. They saw this as providing a window to aspiration and a sense of hope for the future.

8 | DISCUSSION

This study explored the process of supporting young people within an alternative learning space, providing a new perspective on the adult–youth relationships developed within arts-based extracurricular programmes, including the centrality of authentic adult–youth relationships, a collaborative approach and fostering agency. The thematic interaction is shown in Figure 2, in comparison to the findings of Jones and Deutsch (2010) in their observations of an extracurricular activity.

As can be seen, there is some overlap between the two models. However, the voice of the participants in this study provides more detail on the strategies used by facilitators to enact some of the concepts identified in the earlier literature. In addition, it places more emphasis on the authenticity of the relationship and the focus on positive emotional material in the communication between adult and youth.

Furthermore, the facilitators felt the increased agency observed in children resulted in developmental outcomes similar to those associated with youth socioemotional and identity development (Jones & Deutsch, 2010). Taken together, facilitators in the current study emphasised adult–youth mutuality, which is consistent with models of adult–youth relationships in the literature such as Jones and Deutsch (2010).

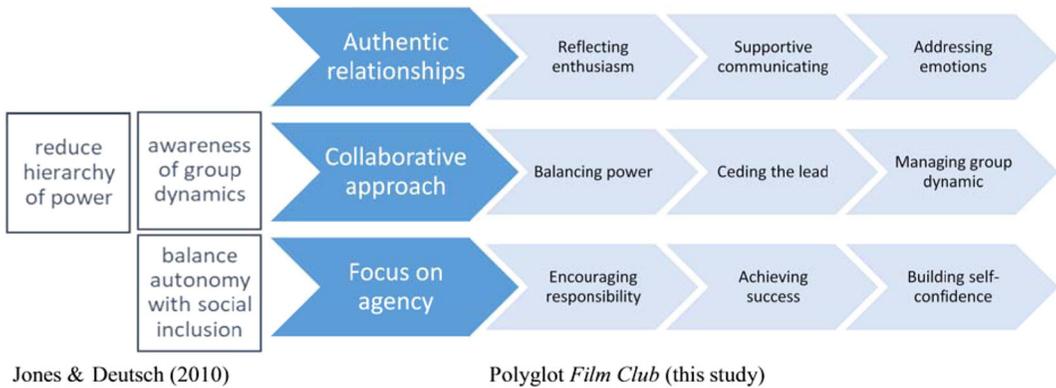


FIGURE 2 Film Club Facilitators approach to adult–youth relationships within the programme, compared to Jones and Deutsch (2010) model

8.1 | The centrality of the adult–youth relationship

When experienced and professional film artists and film makers work with young children, it would be intuitive that they might presuppose a teaching or guiding role. However, the facilitators in this study did not describe their role as being a teacher, director or mentor. Facilitators did not use the word mentor, however, all facilitators provided qualitative descriptions of these relationships that would fit the definition of a mentor, defined by Rhodes et al. (2006) as a supportive and caring nonparental adult. It may be that the distinction facilitators made between mentoring and their role was in the more creative and collaborative nature of the relationship, focussed on increasing youth agency. The relationships were described as flexible and free, providing youth an opportunity to engage with caring adults in spontaneous and fun ways. It was this compassionate and engaged tone that facilitators felt allowed for the development of authentic and meaningful relationships, and a holistic learning environment (Pryce & Keller, 2011). Facilitators felt their role included the creation of these “different” adult–youth relationships so as to offer opportunities for young people to practice relational skills within a socially and emotionally safe environment. This study supports previous research suggesting that creative extracurricular spaces facilitated by caring adults offer unique opportunities for socioemotional development (Blum-Ross, 2013; Grunstein & Nutbeam, 2007). It also supports theoretical models which position the relationship between a young person and a supportive adult as the central component of positive youth development and youth resilience (Lerner et al., 2011; Ungar & Lerner, 2008).

The collaborative strategy characterised by reflecting enthusiasm, supporting communication and addressing emotions describes facilitators' approaches to connecting with the young people. This exposure to rewarding relationships likely supported the increased motivation for school engagement that was shown prior research with the Film Club participants, providing children with connectivity that may motivate engagement in learning environments (Chapin et al., 2019).

Film Club facilitators reported balancing child autonomy with supportive social inclusion, providing opportunities that support the development of positive peer relationships, prosocial behaviour and interpersonal confidence (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Jones & Deutsch, 2010; Rhodes et al., 2006). In the event of challenges between children within the Film Club, such as children with conflicting ideas, or children being isolated, the Film Club facilitators reported a strategy of intervening early. Facilitators felt that this helped the children feel valued and ensure that interpersonal conflicts are not given the opportunity to escalate dramatically.

8.2 | Engagement and collaboration

Film Club facilitators made a conscious effort to be collaborators and to act outside of power structures that usually govern the interaction between adults and youth. By speaking to the young people about their interests, using their language in communication and matching youth energy, facilitators were able to dismantle power preconceptions, and create a useful space where the young participants could engage and explore freely. These findings support models which state that reducing hierarchy within extracurricular settings helps to bridge the gap between youth and adults (Jones & Deutsch, 2010). This engagement needs to consider the developmental needs of young people by maintaining youth autonomy, socialisation and fun (Rhodes et al., 2000; Sharp, 2014).

The informal supportive nature of the adult–youth relationship within Film Club created a climate of acceptance, supporting previous research that adults within extracurricular settings are well positioned to engage in emotional reflection and supportive emotion coaching with children (Sharp, 2014).

Prosocial behaviour was encouraged through modelling by facilitators, giving responsibility and teamwork. Relational factors were consistently felt to drive child engagement in Film Club, consistent with previous research that emphasises the benefit of holistic learning environments (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Zins & Elias, 2007). It is evident that through Film Club facilitators create an environment for children that make use of prominent interpersonal elements known to support socioemotional learning, such as empathy for others and responsible decision-making (Weissberg et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007).

8.3 | The process of fostering agency

Previous research demonstrates environments where young people feel safe enough to take chances and try new things, an excitement for learning can develop independently from success, supporting genuine excitement and encouraging engagement (Bruner, 1996; Carr, 2004). The Film Club facilitators proposed that the safe and cooperative environment of the Film Club enables members to engage with the unique challenges of making films, facilitating genuine engagement and learning. Previous research indicates that supportive relationships within extracurricular spaces aid the development of a broader and more adaptive view of the self and the world (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008), as well as creating a deeply meaningful learning environment that promotes a growth-focused mindset (Carr, 2004). This open engagement is thought to create a cycle of engagement that motivates a drive for social and academic success (Rhodes, 2004; Rhodes et al., 2006; Sharp, 2014).

Film Club facilitators also spoke of themselves as role models who valued youth ideas. They saw themselves as helping to nurture a sense of capability. Facilitators spoke of how palpable this growing sense of hope and possibility for the future was, reporting that this allowed the young participants to imagine different identities, careers and lives for themselves. A large qualitative study of a youth arts programme concluded that adult leaders play a critical role in maintaining a fit between the challenges youth experienced and their ability to respond to those challenges, thus giving them a sense of self efficacy in the “real world” that is not too overwhelming (Larson & Walker, 2006). This appears to be a similar process to that described by Film Club facilitators.

The facilitators proposed that allowing youth to lead the creative process, and constantly encouraging collaboration, involvement and responsibility, the young participants are able to experience ownership over the relationship developed, the lessons learned and, ultimately, the film they created. Both the facilitators and previous literature suggest that less rigid extracurricular settings are well positioned to support the development of youth agency (Greene et al., 2013; Matsuoka et al., 2015).

8.4 | Limitations

This study was limited to one group of extracurricular facilitators, working within a shared sociocultural environment at one point in time, limiting much of the longer-term assumptions made by this study to a theoretical stance. To date no follow up assessment of children involved in Film Club has been made, nor has a longitudinal assessment of Film Club facilitators' changes in facilitation approach over time in the programme. A comparison with a group of facilitators from an arts-based extracurricular programme with a different demographic of facilitators may also yield useful comparative information.

9 | CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that Film Club facilitators develop authentic adult–youth relationships using a collaborative approach to develop child agency. These results provide further perspective of how facilitators negotiate the relationships required to enact successful extracurricular programmes, and give contextual information to how those relationships relate to the gains reported by youth participants.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

This study was funded by Polyglot Theatre Company, which runs the Film Club. This study is related to a 3-year programme evaluation.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was approved by the Victoria University Human Research and Ethics Committee, application HRE16-267 and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1002/jcop.22513>.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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